

VZCZCXRO3837  
PP RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHBK #1167/01 1340251  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 140251Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7003  
INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7026  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9657  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 5479  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1600  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2668  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 6548

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 BANGKOK 001167

SIPDIS

NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/14/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: LOCAL OFFICIALS' VIEWS OF THE  
MUSLIM MALAY INSURGENCY AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

REF: A. BANGKOK 1061 (TARGETED KILLINGS)  
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 125 (ABHISIT'S PLAN)  
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 618 (GRISLY INCIDENTS)  
[1](#)D. 08 BANGKOK 2410 (FEWER ABUSES BUT PROBLEMS REMAIN)

BANGKOK 00001167 001.2 OF 005

Classified By: DCM JAMES F. ENTWISTLE, REASON 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A range of provincial government and security officials gave us differing views about the security situation in the deep south, the state of the Malay Muslim insurgency, and possible government countermeasures during a mid-March trip to southern Thailand. A Narathiwat vice governor said Narathiwat's security conditions were much the same as they had been a year ago, while his Yala counterpart told us security in Yala was improving; both had launched local initiatives to try to reduce separatist sympathy and increase understanding between the population, religious leaders, and local officials. Both maintained that militants continued to use Islamic schools as venues for radicalization and recruitment; they believed teachers responsible for recruitment activities had connections to central Java, Indonesia. Ministry of Justice and military officials at the Southern Border Provinces Administration Center (SBPAC) provided little new information about the insurgency, but told us they were embarking on new efforts to use less confrontational tactics in their response to the violence and to build confidence in the rule of law and system of justice.

The Vice-Governors and police officers at the Yala Forward Command suggested that detained suspects indicate they had joined the insurgency for a mix of religious and Patani identity reasons; one detainee we were shown at the Command's detention center had reportedly confessed to a decade-long affiliation with BRN-C.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: None of our on-the-ground interlocutors thought that PM Abhisit's proposed "civilianization" of the RTG anti-insurgency effort, while well-meaning, would lead to its promised shift in control and resources from the army to civilian authorities. Analysts have previously noted that the insurgency manifests itself differently in each affected province (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and several adjoining districts in Songkhla province). Allegations that educational ties to Indonesia plays some role in the conflict are also not surprising, since there have long been concerns

about possible influence and support from the broader Southeast Asian Malay-Muslim community. While the militants are adept at using religion to legitimate their separatist cause, we have no good baseline for measuring whether claims that some recent detainees cite religion as a primary motivating factor constitutes a change in the rationale for new recruits to join the insurgency. This cable is one of a series looking at the situation in the deep south; Ref A covered targeted killings attributed to both sides, and septel will address views of local academics and civil society activists of the current state of the conflict and possible solutions. End Summary and Comment.

Coming to grasp with the extent of the Problem  
-----

13. (C) A range of government and security officials talked to us about the security situation on the ground, and the Democrat-led government's strategy for dealing with the violence, during a mid-March trip to the deep south. Since our last trip to the region in October 2008, there has been renewed political interest in finding a solution to the southern conflict, with PM Abhisit coming into office in December vowing sweeping changes to the way the RTG addressed the insurgency from a military-led effort to one controlled by the civilian government (ref B). In January, Abhisit created a "southern cabinet" to take the policy initiative on the issue. Since the end of January, the RTG has allocated some \$2 billion for dealing with the conflict, according to press sources, and has increased the number of security forces in the South to roughly 62,000. Meanwhile, the violence continues apace, with insurgents grabbing headlines with gruesome attacks on both security forces and civilians, and human rights organizations alleging security forces have

BANGKOK 00001167 002.2 OF 005

resorted to extrajudicial killings in their quest to secure the region (ref A).

Narathiwat: fewer red zones, but no let-up in the violence  
-----

14. (C) Nipon Narapitakkul, Vice Governor for Security Affairs in Narathiwat, noted that the number of violent incidents in Narathiwat had decreased over the last year (from 25/month to 10), but that casualties per incident had risen; more importantly, there was no increased understanding between the populace and authorities. While the military reported that the number of areas/villages classified as "red zones" have been reduced, Nipon asserted there were still many districts in Narathiwat he could not visit without a military convoy. Currently, the situation in Narathiwat was too dangerous for unescorted civil servants to travel to red zone villages, which affects how social services are provided to the local population, said Nipon, who travels in a lightly armored pick-up truck.

15. (C) Nipon believed that for the situation to improve further, the government must improve both security and "intangibles" to restore the confidence of the local people. Nipon described the effort to put peace building (Pattana Santi) units into red-zone villages, consisting of 12 soldiers or rangers, four police officers, and two civilian defense volunteers, with a mission to promote peace in what would be called peace building villages. His own effort in Narathiwat involved the establishment of what he called traveling truth commissions comprised of Islamic committee members and village leaders. The teams travel around the province and hold meetings at mosques to "disseminate the truth" about Islam and the conflict, including that all religions consider killing a sin. The teams did not venture into the red zones, not because of safety reasons, but because they believed no one would talk to them. Nipon stated it was possible to do this in Narathiwat because the Narathiwat Islamic committee sided with the government, but that the approach had not been replicated in Yala or Pattani

to date.

¶16. (C) Addressing the problem of unit turnover and situational awareness, Nipon told us that the army's new 15th Development Division would take over operations in the deep South from units rotating into the South from the other Army Areas, and that the Division would be part of the Fourth Army Area, providing more consistency. Nipon lamented, however, that the military remained completely in charge in the South and that its tools for fighting the insurgency were not effective in dealing with this type of conflict. He was skeptical that PM Abhisit's initiative would result in any changes on the ground, because he did not believe the military would relinquish control of the money allocated to solve the conflict. Nipon also asserted Thailand needed to change the traditional concept of what it means to be Thai: if Malays in Malaysia could accept religious and ethnic differences and Chinese and Tamil-Indians as fellow citizens, (buddhist) Thais needed to do likewise.

¶17. (C) Commenting on the insurgents, Nipon told us that Islamic teachers were continuing to recruit and radicalize students and that the majority of the teachers responsible for recruitment had trained in Indonesia in Solo/central Java. He said that people detained in connection to the insurgency identified themselves only as "Patani fighters," not BRN-C or PULO. Nipon said they tell him that they joined the movement because "it is the duty of the people of Patani to rise-up against the government." According to Nipon, authorities had yet to identify or capture anyone clearly identified with the movement's leadership.

¶18. (C) On human rights, Nipon described continued but slowly subsiding anger in Narathiwat's villages about the alleged extrajudicial killings of two Imams earlier in the year. Speaking specifically about Imam Yapa, the Muslim cleric killed while in Army custody in March 2008 (ref D), he said he had to inform Yapa's widow about the incident. Nipon he

BANGKOK 00001167 003.2 OF 005

said another incident like Yapa's killing would further stoke the already considerable resentment built-up in the villages towards authorities.

Yala: possibly more secure, concerned about recruitment  
-----

¶19. (C) Grisada Boonrach, Vice Governor in charge of security in Yala province, asserted that the security situation in Yala had improved over the last year, that the number of "red zones" in Yala had decreased to 23 (from a high of 175 such zones), and that--in contrast to Nipon and the situation in 2005/06--he could travel to all of them. Grisada defined a red zone villages as ones without a (RTG-appointed) headman, with a burned/closed school or a record of violent incidents, or one for which there were intel reports of significant numbers of sympathizers.

¶10. (C) Although concerned about the day-today violence, Grisada was not worried the conflict would expand. He assessed that there was no chance the militants would force a separation of the affected areas from Thailand, and that there was no indication that many southerners supported the cause of separatism. Grisada modestly claimed credit for the Pattana Santi team concept and described an additional initiative of his in Yala to try to reduce the zones of violence: trying to convince village headmen, the local imams, and the district representative to sign an agreement to keep their village peaceful. Of the 58 villages he'd succeeded in "enrolling" in the effort, he'd met with a 60% success rate.

¶11. (C) Addressing recruitment profiles, Grisada told us that most of the insurgents arrested in Yala were between the ages of 14 and 35 and that schools were the primary recruiting ground. He relayed the story of a recently arrested 14 year

old militant in Yala's Raman district as typical: recruited into the movement while in school by an ustaz, or religious teacher; attended physical and weapons training for about 10 days in Bannang Sata district in Yala; received a call from someone he did not know, with instructions to carry out an insurgent activity at a certain locale. Detained suspects often tell their interrogators that they joined the insurgency to be warriors for God, a sign to Grisada, that militants are adept at using religion to legitimate their separatist ideology.

¶12. (C) Countering one commonly-held perception, Grisada asserted that recruitment does not happen exclusively in pondoks but occurs with perhaps more frequency in government-supported private religious schools that teach both Islam as well as secular subjects. He said the majority of the Ustadz in question either went to school in Indonesia or have some other connection to Indonesia (Jokjakarta/Solo in central Java). The provincial authorities believe they know who these key recruiter Ustadz are, claimed Grisada, but are powerless to intervene because there is no evidence that they have broken any laws.

¶13. (C) Grisada blamed the government's inability to counter the militants, recruitment efforts on Bangkok and the Islamic committees. He said the continuing national political drama made it virtually impossible to undertake any meaningful reform of the system of education, and that neither the provincial nor the national Islamic committees were able to help because, like the government, these institutions did not command the respect of the Malay-Muslim communities in Yala. He said security officials were not welcome in the schools and so made few visits.

ISOC and SBPC: friendly but formulaic  
-----

¶14. (C) Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) officials at the Southern Border Provinces Administration Center (SBPAC), representing the Ministry of Justice (Kitti Surakamhaeng), the military (Fourth Army Area spokesperson COL Parinya Chaidilok and ISOC Chief of Intelligence COL

BANGKOK 00001167 004.2 OF 005

Noppadon Uttanangool), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Vithit Powattanasuk), shared largely formulaic views with us in friendly fashion, including predictions of significantly improved conditions by October, departing from the more frank, sobering assessments of Nipon and Grisada.

¶15. (C) While Kitti's main presentation focused on the need to boost the confidence of the local population in the judicial system in southern Thailand and government's efforts to ensure everyone is treated equally by the judiciary, COL Noppadon would not acknowledge that the late January killing of an Imam set back government efforts considerably. He suggested instead that the Imam was likely connected to narcotics trade or the victim of intra-insurgency rivalries. For his part, Kitti acknowledged that some security officials in the South had abused human rights but stressed those guilty of abuse constitute only a very small percentage. Kitti suggested some human rights groups exaggerate abuses perpetrated by the security forces, feeding a perception by southerners of systemic injustice; regardless, the state must ensure equality before the law to give the state more legitimacy in the eyes of the local populace.

¶16. (C) COL Noppadon asserted that ethnic differences between Buddhists and Malay Muslims were the cause of the conflict and drove the militants to fight for separation from the Thai state. Detainees and southern militants who did not acknowledge that the conflict was about separatism were being misled. According to Noppadon, the military was trying to adopt a less confrontational approach to dealing with the conflict and had achieved better cooperation in the villages,

particularly in identifying "troublesome elements." Noppadon and other RTA officials present expressed support for the continued use of martial law and the emergency decree in the South as necessary tools to fight the insurgency which did not undermine efforts to promote transparency and the rule of law in the South.

The Police Yala Forward Command/Detention Center  
-----

¶17. (C) At a lunch meeting and detention facility tour at the Royal Thai Police Yala Forward Command headquarters (now RTP Region 10) COL Pogwvit Pongsri, Deputy Chief of Staff and Chief of Policy and Plans, assured us that all suspects detained by police were treated fairly, provided a briefing on detention statistics over the past several years, and showed us a well-maintained, clean detention facility. He said the 46-room detention facility at the Yala Forward command was often the first place police brought many suspects after arrest (note: nearly all complaints about detention incidents are linked to ad hoc army-run facilities).

¶18. (C) Pongwvit said all interrogations were conducted humanely, with interrogators spending a great deal of time building rapport with the suspects. If after 30 days in detention there was insufficient evidence to connect the suspect to a crime, the suspect was returned home, albeit without compensation for time spent in detention. If evidence is uncovered, the case goes to court, with the defendant moved to a different detention facility. The RTP officers accompanying us on the tour acknowledged the low percentage of cases that go to court - some 21 percent, while roughly 78 percent are released due to lack of evidence.

¶19. (C) According to our RTP hosts, most recent suspects coming through the facility are between 20 and 30 years old and have told their interrogators they were recruited into the conflict primarily for reasons connected to religious ideology--what the police called a distorted understanding of Islamic imperatives--rather than separatism. That said, the one insurgent the police introduced us to supposedly had been recruited by BRN-C a decade earlier; police said he had been "brainwashed" to support the separatist cause and had been arrested ten days prior for having placed a bomb in a motorcycle in Hat Yai, Songkhla province. When we asked why

BANGKOK 00001167 005.2 OF 005

he did so, the short, dark-skinned, ethnic Malay 34 year-old suspect, who earlier had been laughing with his younger, tall, light-skinned Sino-Thai interrogator, shrugged his shoulders and replied: "because I was ordered to."  
JOHN